
Subject: SECUCC News and a Merry Christmas!

From: Southeast Conference UCC (clwaldron@secucc.org)

To: michaelstroud@bellsouth.net;

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FEATURE FOCUS





Disaster Ministries in Action - Spotlight on Uplands Village Residents Rich and Holly Nelson

Contributed by Mary Schantz

Rich and Rev. Dr. Holly Nelson, residents of Uplands Village since 2012, each volunteer their time in response to disaster through the United Church of Christ's National Disaster Ministries. Rich serves as Disaster Coordinator for the UCC's Southeast Conference, while Holly is a Board Certified Chaplain who serves as a Disaster Chaplain for the national church.

When a disaster strikes in the southeastern U.S., such as the destructive tornadoes that ripped through Alabama in 2011, Rich begins to work with the local Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), which includes representatives from the Red Cross, FEMA, state and local authorities, Church World Service and a host of other groups involved in providing disaster relief. Together they determine what organizations are already providing relief, what resources they bring, what is still needed to help those who have been affected, and how best to coordinate all of these resources.

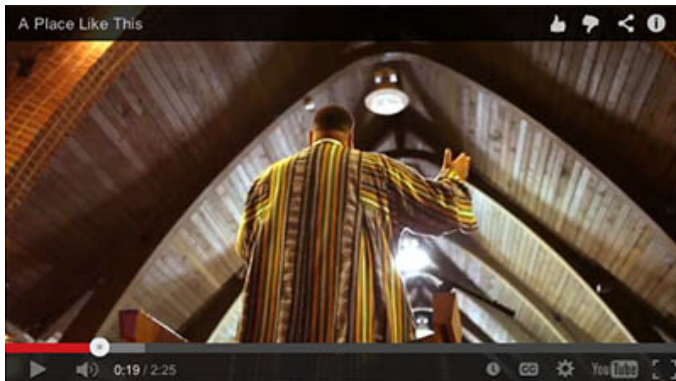
[Read the rest of this article on the SECUCC website by clicking here.](#)





Merry Christmas and a Blessed Advent from the staff of the Southeast Conference!

CONFERENCE NEWS



The UCC Increases Support to New and Renewing Churches

The United Church of Christ has doubled its investment in the future this past fall in new and renewing churches. UCC Local Church Ministries is funding 27 new, renewing and multiplying congregations with grants totaling \$458,000 - which is twice the number of congregations and money invested by LCM in previous biannual funding cycles - to plant progressive faith communities in different corners of the country and support young churches early in their ministry.

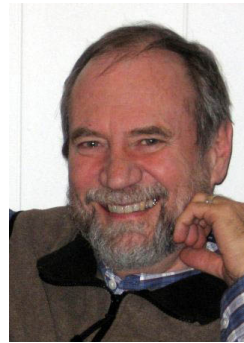
These new grants continue to support many of the church plants in the Southeast Conference, including Praxis UCC in Atlanta and Restoration Inclusive Ministries in Decatur, who received grants in this round of funding. This is in line with the National UCC vision of creating new churches across the country, highlighted at the Testimony! event at this year's General Synod.

[Click here to read more at the National Church website](#)

[You can also click on this link or the image above to view the "A Place Like This" video highlighting the vision to create new and renewing UCC churches](#)

STILLSPEAKING

ICM Reflections



Leaving the Light on ...

It appears that I'm now past the half-way point of my interim work among you. Since I first left Montana on July 21 to begin my time with you, I have driven many miles and visited 30 of our SEC congregations plus 3 possible new settings. I most likely won't make it to all of our congregations, but by now I've experienced enough to have a basis for some general observations. I want to share some of these with you, but first I want to put them in context with this season of Advent and this special time in world history when we honor the legacy of Nelson Mandela.

I have always enjoyed one of the key rituals of Advent: the lighting of candles and the naming of the hopes these symbolize for us: The lighting of the first candle symbolizes expectation, the second symbolizes hope, the third joy and the fourth purity. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day reminding Christians that Jesus is the light of the world. And when I think about that white candle I'm always reminded of the words from John 1: 4-5: *... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* (NRSV)

From time to time in human history special people emerge who more than most embody the attributes which our Advent candles symbolize. The latest such person was Nelson Mandela, and you have no need I'm sure for me to describe the light that shined in his life - the news has been full of abundant deserved praise and comments. But the one thing I do want to share are some points that have been made by Andrew Young as he has reflected upon his personal friendship with Mandela in more than one response to media:

... it's a mistake to look at former South African President Nelson Mandela as a political figure and forget how his strong religious beliefs sustained him...He was extremely



Save the Date: Winter Youth Retreat

Mark down January 17-20 on your calendars for the annual Winter Youth Retreat at Blowing Rock Conference Center! Each year the retreat brings youth together from across the Southeast and Southern Conferences to explore themes of justice, have fun, and connect on the faith journey. More details will be coming soon. [Registration materials can be downloaded by clicking here.](#)

Generosity Corner

OCWM Local Church payments are due....

Into the Conference by January 15, 2014. It is very important that all churches make every effort to fulfill their 2013 pledge to Our Churches Wider Mission. It is vital for the future of this Conference as well as to the Wider Church. Thank you.

The gift of generosity

This holiday season, we thank everyone who has

supported the Southeast Conference this past year with their time, talent and financial contributions and look forward to support from all of you in the year ahead. If you need a convenient way to make an additional gift to the Capital Campaign or Our Church's Wider Mission, one option is to look into our electronic giving option. As the pace of life speeds up, especially around the holidays, you may find electronic giving a most welcome way to make contributions. Just go to our donate button on the front page of the website or [click here to get to our online giving page.](#)

TYPHOON Haiyan UPDATE - Our One Great Hour of Sharing donations at work...

Check out this short video of a UCC pastor's recent mission trip to the Philippines. It was quite an amazing account of the work being done there. If you have not already made a special donation for relief efforts, you still can.

Panay, Philippines

well-educated. He was born and raised in the Methodist Church, by Methodist school, by Methodist missionaries. And he was a devout Christian who took his imprisonment very much like the Apostle Paul took his, as part of the trials and tribulations of leadership... (it is what led Mandela to believe) that you could only defeat apartheid through love and understanding.

What Andrew Young has observed and what Nelson Mandela lived out is the essence of our hope each Advent...that the hope of the world is embodied in the gift we receive as the light of the world. As we live out that gift we do for others what President George H. Bush intended with his 1989 vision of a "thousand points of light" that invited the nation to take action through service to their fellow citizens. It is through such action that we accomplish what Tom Bodett ad-libbed for all of us in his famous line: "We'll leave the light on for you."

[\(Click here to read more!\)](#)

-- Shalom, Randy



PATHWAYS has just launched a new Level 1 Cohort that has completed its first course in "Learning and Collaborating Online." The new cohort and existing cohorts are scheduled to take the following courses in the coming new year. All three courses will begin on January 22, 2014.

Level 1 Courses:

- L1.2 - Doing Theology in the 21st Century
- L1.7 - The Art of Worship

Level 2 Course:

- L2.H&P - UCC History and Polity

To inquire more info on PATHWAYS Theological Education, please visit www.tasc21.net or send an email to admin_pathways@tasc21.net





[You can read more by clicking here](#)

Are you 70 1/2 years or older?....

You can take advantage of a current tax law to give contributions of appreciated stock or contributions from an IRA directly to your local congregation or the Southeast Conference.

As of December 1, 2013, the IRA Charitable Rollover is valid only through December 31 of 2013. Congress can act to extend the tax provision, but there is no indication that will happen.

- * Donors must be age 70 ½ or older at the time the IRA distribution is made to a qualified charity.
- * Distributions must be made before Jan. 1, 2014.
- * The distributions must be made directly from the IRA custodian to a charity or charities.
- * The amounts distributed from an IRA as qualified charitable distributions are excluded from the Adjusted Gross Income of the taxpayer, so no tax is due on the distribution.
- * An individual taxpayer may make tax-free IRA distributions of any amount up to a total of \$100,000 for 2013.
- * The distributions may be made at any time throughout the year and to as many charities as desired as long as the total does not exceed \$100,000 for 2013.
- * IRA owners over age 70 ½ are forced to take required minimum distributions. The good news is that qualified charitable IRA distributions are counted up to the \$100,000 maximum to satisfy the annual required minimum distribution.
- * Qualified charitable distributions may be made from traditional IRAs but not from SEP IRAs or SIMPLE IRAs.
- * The donor does not receive a double tax benefit when making tax-free IRA distributions to qualified charities. That is because the distribution is excluded from the



United Church Fund Investor Conference

Attention All Church Treasurers, Endowment Chairs, Church Finance Committees and interested SEC persons.....

The annual United Church Fund Investor Conference is coming to Charleston, South Carolina January 17 and 18, 2014. ICM Randy Hyvonen attended the event last January and found it to be very informative and well planned. This conference will include a panel discussion on United Church Funds' response to the UCC's fossil fuels resolution, along with workshops on impact investing, endowment policy essentials, endowment fundraising, and dynamic keynote speakers.

The event will be hosted in the South East Conference, so it would be great to see a number of our churches attend. Please join us there!

[Click here to get more information.](#)



UCC Exceeds \$250 Million Goal for Typhoon Haiyan Relief

Donations came in rapidly and in large numbers to assist people in the Philippines put their lives back together after Typhoon Haiyan. Those generous gifts from a multitude of contributors enabled the United Church of Christ and the Disaster Ministries team to raise more than a quarter million dollars in just weeks. With gratitude, the UCC announced it surpassed its \$250,000 goal on Friday, Dec. 6, with \$250,641 to date.

[Click here to read more of the article on the UCC website](#)

Thanks to all in the Southeast Conference who have contributed to the relief effort!

Tax Exempt Status for Ministers Deemed Unconstitutional

Last week a federal court in Wisconsin issued a ruling

That is because the distribution is excluded from the taxpayer's Adjusted Gross Income, a deduction as a charitable contribution is not also allowed.

* The charity in receipt of a qualifying charitable distribution from an IRA must provide a "contemporaneous written acknowledgement" or the taxpayer risks losing the tax-free treatment.

Those who want to give in this way are strongly encouraged to consult with their personal financial and tax professionals.

Last week a federal court in Wisconsin issued a ruling that declared the law that allows ministers to receive a tax-exempt housing allowance to be unconstitutional. It is important to note that this ruling will not go into effect unless the decision is upheld during the appeals process, which could take several months. The Office of General Counsel prepared a press release with more information about the ruling, which is available by clicking here. We encourage you to read it. The Office of General Counsel will continue to monitor the case and advise as appropriate. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.



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Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ



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